

# TEMPLES OF INDIA

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*India is a land of dynamic diversity. Its recorded civilization is one of the oldest in the entire world history, dating back some five thousand years. A vast continent of nearly 870 million people, it stretches some 2000 miles North to South and about 1700 miles East to West and contains a bewildering diversity of languages, religions, races and cultures in the bosom than any other country in the world. It is because of this endlessly fascinating variety and richness that in its heyday, India used to be known as the "Golden Bird".*

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*"KNOW INDIA SERIES" books are Designed to introduce the reader to this diversity and lead him through the long and fascinating journey of India's history, geography, mythology, art and culture.*

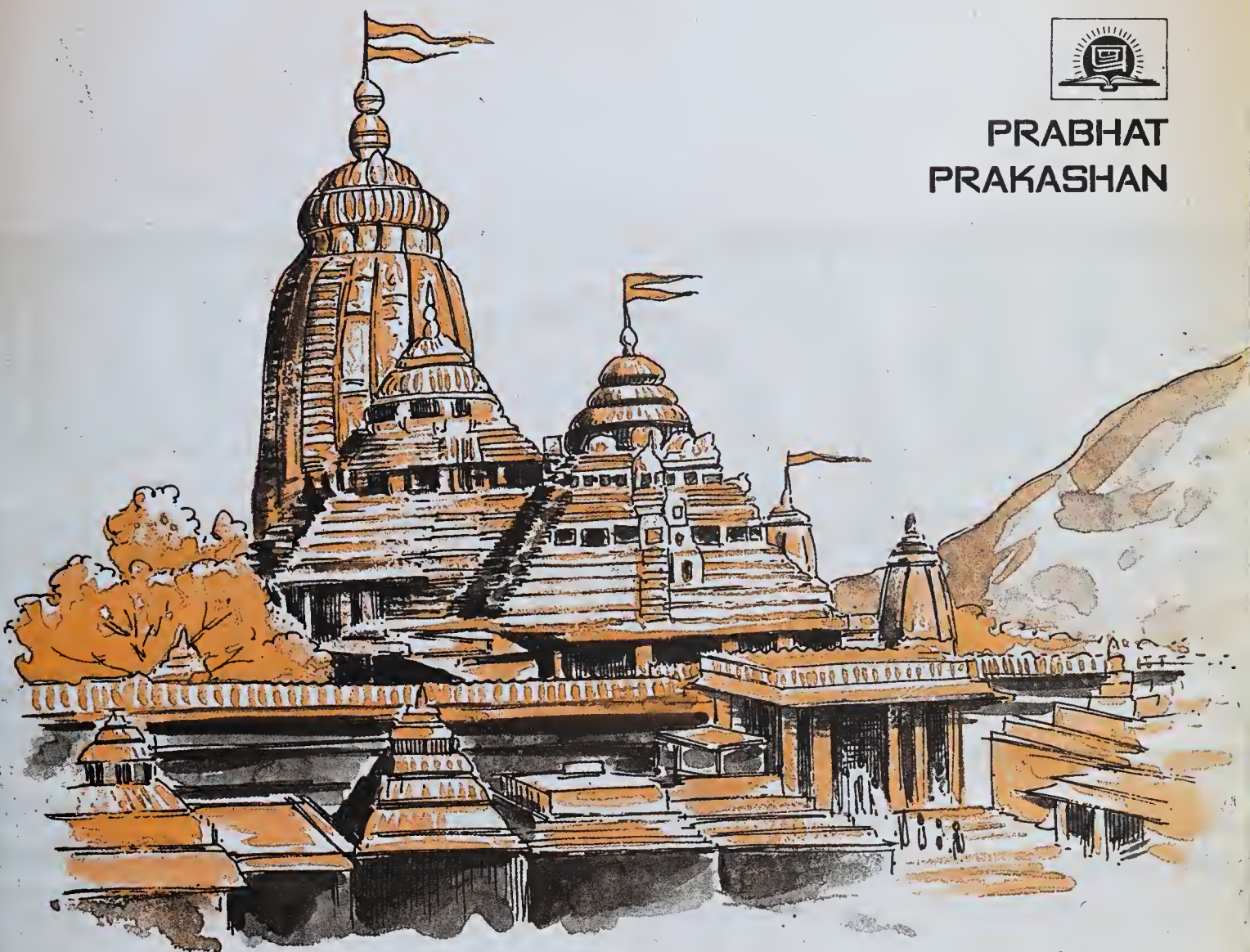
*This is a voyage of pleasant discovery.*



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**PRABHAT  
PRAKASHAN**





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## KONARK

Bhubaneswar is the capital of Orissa. It is called a city of temples. At a distance of sixty five km from Bhubaneshwar there is a world famous temple known as Konark Temple.

Once Raja Narsingh Deo saw a beautiful scene at the bank of Chandra Bhaga river at Konark. The sun was rising. This scene impressed him so much that he immediately decided to build a Sun temple on that spot.

There is a story also about Sun temple of Konark. It is said that Samb, son of Lord Krishna, saw the *Gopies* with lustful eyes. He became a leper by the curse of Lord Krishna. In Maitreya jungle he worshipped and performed incantations of Sun god. Then only he was cured of leprosy.

During religious prayers Samb visualized Sun god sitting on a lotus flower in Chandra Bhaga river. When Samb was cured of leprosy he himself laid foundation of this world famous temple and later on it was completed by Narsingh Deo.

This temple was built in the supervision of a craftsman named Vishu. Twelve hundred workers were engaged in its construction. The construction of this temple was started in the year 1238 and was completed in twelve years.

At that time the *Yavanas* were very powerful in that region. Narsingh Deo had defeated the *Yavanas* and he built this beautiful temple in memory of his victory.

One can reach Konark via Bhubaneshwar or Jagannath Puri. Buses are also available on this route. Bhubaneshwar and Puri



are also connected by road and rail with other parts of the country.

The Sun temple is 68 metres in height. There are seven horses attached to the chariot of Sun god. The craftsmanship of the temple is worth seeing and such a fine carving work on stone is not seen anywhere else.

There is an amazing story about this temple that it had turned into ruins before it was completed.

Another story is that a craftsman named Shivi undertook the construction work. When he left his house his wife was alone in the house and she was pregnant also.

The construction of temple took many years but they were not able to put pinnacle dome (*kalash*) on its top. The king called for Shivi and ordered that in case he was not able to put the pinnacle on the top of the temple within a month, he will be awarded capital punishment.

By then Shivi's wife had given birth to a male child who was twelve years old now. She narrated every thing to her son about his father. He decided to meet his father. While setting out he took jujube of his garden for identification.

When Shivi's son Dharmapada reached Konark he was delighted to see the temple constructed by his father. Shivi was also very happy to meet his son. He hugged his son in joy.

During night when Shivi was discussing the plan of erection of pinnacle dome with his colleagues, Dharampada was also sitting beside him. He told his father that he had read all the books on craftsmanship available at their house and he could erect the pinnacle dome.

Shivi could not believe it, but whatever Dharampada said to his father verbally he proved it by giving it a practical shape. He erected the pinnacle dome on the top of the temple but jumped from there to save the lives of twelve hundred workers. He knew that when the king would come to know that his workers could not erect the pinnacle dome, he will award capital punishment to them.

Seeing the sacrifice of his son, Shivi could not control his tears.



Even today there is a saying famous in Oriya language which means that 'You love your son or twelve hundred workers?'

Some people say that after the<sup>c</sup>death of his son Shivi had gone mad. He himself started destroying the temple; some people say that it was due to a curse.

Whatever it may be, the remaining parts of the temple are examples of the fact that the temple was matchless from artistic point of view. Such a fine carving on stone is not available at any other place.

Now Government has established a museum there.

## SOMNATH

Somnath is a famous ancient Indian temple. It is in Kathiyawad region of Gujarat state. This temple was famous for its huge store of gold, diamond and jewellery. There were 56 pillars of sapphire.

Somnath temple is at Prabhas Patan which is at a distance of four kilometres from Veraval railway station. It is linked with metal roads and buses are also available for this place.

Somnath temple is situated at sea beach. The architectural skill and craftsmanship of the temple is worth seeing.

It is said that it was demolished many times and each time the devotees rebuilt it with more devotion. It is impossible to say that who was its first builder as we do not get any concrete proof about this even in history.

Historians believe that the ancient temple of Somnath was looted and destroyed by Aravya looters in 649 B.C. and it was rebuilt in 8th century.

The regal cast in the traditional Hindu cast-hierarchy, the *kshatriya* kings of Challukya dynasty, rendered a lot of help in building this temple.

Mahmood Gaznavi invaded Somnath in the year 1024. He had brought a large army by alluring soldiers for booty. At the time of his invasion Somnath was a world famous temple.

Bappa Rawal was a great warrior. He challenged Mahmood Gaznavi. Gaznavi wanted to clear his way by defeating him because it was difficult for him to reach Somnath without defeating Bappa Rawal. Other *kshatriya* kings also came forward to save Somnath temple.







Bappa Rawal did not allow Mahmood Gaznavi to have his way. He challenged him to fight with him.

Mahmood Gaznavi was a cunning fellow. He knew that Hindus do not attack cows. When he was at the verge of defeat, he played a trick and drove the cows in front of the army of Hindus.

The priests of the temple prevented the *kshatriya* kings from fighting Mahmood Gaznavi. They were of the belief that Gaznavi would run away with fear and they would be able to prove God's thaumaturgic powers with their *mantras*. Gaznavi got a golden opportunity because of this and he attacked the temple. He turned his sure defeat into victory and killed the temple priest.

Mahmood Gaznavi looted the temple and loaded horses, elephants, camels with gold, silver, diamond, jewellery, emerald and other precious stones and took them to his country. He not only looted Somnath temple but also brutally butchered the people after torturing them.

The Indian kings again tried to encounter him unitedly but he arrested Gobha—son of the temple priest. Mahmood Gaznavi knew that Gobha was familiar with the roads of the region. He asked him to guide his soldiers to get out of that region using a short cut desert route and promised to free him. Gobha agreed to do so, because he had seen brutal death of his father and he wanted to take revenge. He was a handsome young boy of fourteen years.

He started leading Mahmood Gaznavi's mighty army and behind him was the booty loaded on horses, elephants and camels' back. He took the army to rough desert. In that desert the sand was very hot. There were frequent sand storms and water was not available. Gobha stopped there. Mahmood's army was in great difficulty. He got angry with Gobha and took out his sword to kill him. Gobha burst into laughter and said to Gaznavi that he had taken the revenge and now they would all die.

Mahmood started shouting 'fraud-fraud' and killed Gobha with his sword. The army lost its way in search of water. It became restless and at last lost their lives in desert. The treasure of the temple was also buried in sand of the desert.



It is said that the shining in the desert sand, which can be seen even today, is of the precious treasure.

Some historians are of the view that due to sudden attack from the Rajputs, Mahmood Gaznavi ran away with his army from battle field and lost his life in desert. Whatever may be the reason of his death but it is sure that he could not reach Gazni and died on the way.

After this Raja Bhim Deo re-constructed this temple. Its idols were installed. Siddhraj Jaisingh also helped in this noble work.

Again in the year 1297 Allah-ud-din Khilzi destroyed this famous temple. His Commander Vasrat Khan looted this temple for many days. In the year 1395 Sultan of Gujarat Muzaffar Shah demolished it and in the year 1413 his grandson Sultan Ahmad Shah also demolished and looted this famous temple. It was again looted in the year 1469 by Mahmood Bedhara.

After some time Ahilyabai got repaired this temple. She constructed another temple of Somnath near this temple in the year 1774. At the sanctum sanctorum, after descending twenty two stairs, there is a *Jyotirlinga* in a cave. One can find an earthen lamp always lighted there. The idols of Baba Gorakhnath and Matsyendranath are about fourteen km away from this temple.

Prachi is at a distance of about twenty km from Somnath. There is a pipal tree which is called *moksha* tree. Beneath this tree is the idol of Lord Madhav. There are lakes, Sun pools and many places of pilgrimage. This place is called Prabhas pilgrimage. In ancient Hindu mythological scriptures this place is described as an important place.

There is an old story famous about Prabhas pilgrimage. According to this Raja Daksha had twenty six daughters. They were all married to Moon god, but Moon cared more for Rohini, Other daughters of Raja Daksha were not happy, so he cursed Moon to become a T.B. patient. This is the same Prabhas region where Moon worshipped Lord Shiva who cured him from T.B. disease and the Moon again started nectar rain from this place.

After independence, with the efforts of first Home Minister of India Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, this famous temple of Prabhas

region was built. Even in its new look Somnath temple is standing high with the same dignity. Today also its splendour is not less than that of the ancient temple.





## KAILASH

Kailash mountain is said to be the abode of Lord Shiva. Perhaps due to this reason Nature has itself decorated it. This is a famous place of pilgrimage. It is at a height of about 3,600 metre from sea level. It is located in Tibet region. During 1962 Indo-China war it was overrun by China and since then it is in possession of China.

In the year 1981, with the efforts of Govt. of India it has been reopened for Indian pilgrims.

There are three main routes for Kailash—first one from Kashmir via Ladakh, second from Nepal to Muktinath (through Darma pass) and third from Gangotri. All these three routes are very difficult and uninhabited. One has to pass through snow bound areas. These routes are fit only for well equipped travellers.

There are three other routes to Kailash which are some what easier. Most of the pilgrims take these routes.

First route is from Tanakpur, Pithoragarh, Tawaghat, Kalapani, Navidang, Lipulekh, Taklakot, Mansarovar and finally Kailash.

Tanakpur and Pithoragarh are linked by bus routes and from Pithoragarh one has to go on foot via Tipu pass to Kailash. One can go from Delhi to Champawati by bus and via Dharchula direct to Tawaghat.

Another route is from Kathgodam (rail is available upto this place) to Kapkot (Almora), Oota, Jayanti and passing through valley of Kungrivingri mountain range one can reach Kailash. Buses are available from Kathgodam to Kapkot and rest of the journey is to be undertaken on foot.







Third route is from Rishikesh to Joshimath. Buses are available upto Joshimath and after passing Neeti valley, journey upto Kailash can be undertaken.

After crossing the plains one finds that things are very costly in Tibet. Flour, pulses, rice etc. are costly. It is cheaper to stay in tents.

Eatables are very costly in Tibet and it is essential to carry sufficient eatables, matchbox, candle, torch, tea, condensed milk, medicines and sun glasses.

At the border Chinese soldiers allow the pilgrims to cross the border only after complete search and they do not allow to take camera, binocular or even newspapers and periodicals.

In the plateau region of Tibet there are two pools—Rakshas Tal and Mansarovar Tal. Rakshas Tal is very large. It is said that this is the place where Ravana had performed incantation of Lord Shiva.

The water of Mansarovar is crystal clear. Its diameter is about thirty five km and is oval shaped. There is no flora and fauna. Even lotus are not there. Only swan can be seen there. It is one of the fifty two *Shaktipeethas*. It is an estuary of Saryu and Brahmaputra rivers.

Mount Kailash is thirty km from Mansarovar. One can see Kailash from a distance. Its shape is like *Shivalinga* and from some distance it looks like a lotus of sixteen petals. Water from Kailash drops in Gaurikunda and is always covered with snow.

The parikrama of Kailash is about fifty km long which is covered in two to three days. It is at a height of 5,700 metre from sea level. One feels pleasure in this calm and peaceful place.

## DWARKADHEESH

Dwarka is the foremost of the four chief pilgrimage centres of Hindus. In ancient period it was world famous.

It is stated that ancient Dwarka was submerged in the sea and Dwarka of today is a new one which is at sea beach of Gujarat in Kathiyawad region. Its main temple is Dwarkadheesh. It is also called Ranchhodrai's temple.

Some historians are of the view that in the year 1403 Emperor of Gujarat Mahmood Bagharra looted and demolished it and upto now it has been built five times.

Dwarka is the land of Lord Krishna who was a great policy maker. Once while fighting with Jarasandh he ran away from the battle field and so, he was name Ranchhodrai (absconder). Later on, Jarasandh was killed by Bheem in a wrestling bout organised here by Lord Krishna.

The temple is on a rampart. There are fifty six stairs before its main entrance. Its flag, which is highest in the world, always flutters on top of the temple.

Inside the temple is a beautiful black idol of Lord Chaturbhuji. On its fourth floor is an idol of Ambaji. People believe that this is not the original idol. This idol was found in a pond of a village and the original one was taken by a devotee to *Dakore* and it is still there.

In the north of this temple is the idol of Pradumna. This idol is also black. Adjacent to this idol are the idols of Aniruddh and Baldeva. At the northern side of the temple, near *mokshdwar*, is the temple of Kusheshwar Shiva. It is believed that without going





through it, pilgrimage of Dwarka is not complete.

In the sanctum sanctorum of the temple there are idols of Lord Shiva and his wife Parvati.

The *parikrama* (to go around the idol of a deity) starts from this temple only and ends at the Dwarkadheesh temple. On the way of *parikrama* there are many temples and pools. Devotees believe that one gets happiness, peace and purity here.

In this regard many tales are in prevalence. Some people say that in *Satyuga* (one of the four *yugas*—others being *Dwapar*, *Treta* and *Kali*) Maharaja Raiwat had performed many *yajna* (religious sacrifice) sitting on sacrificial grass. That is why this place is called Kushasthali.

Some intellectuals are of the view that there was a demon named Kūsha. He was a tyrant. Raja Raiwat killed him and saved the people from him. At that time Kusheshwar phallus was installed.

There is another tale that a sage named Durvasa once visited Dwarka. All the Queens of Lord Krishna were busy in his welcome but Rukmini was busy serving her husband Lord Krishna and so was delayed in coming to the service of the sage. The sage was a short-tempered man. He cursed Rukmini that she would be separated from Lord Krishna.

Lord Krishna was busy with the famous Mahabharata battle. He had to stay away from Dwarka. Rukmini was in habit of taking her food and water only after having a glimpse of Lord Krishna. He advised grief-stricken Rukmini to have a glimpse of idol.

In that context she liked the idea of Lord Krishna. She established an idol of Lord Krishna in the temple and the present idol is the same one. Later on Raja Vrijnabh built this temple and got the idol installed in its sanctum sanctorum. There is a tale that the temple constructed by Vrijnabh was also submerged in the sea. Its remains were found in the excavation.

It is really true that Dwarka has its own importance.



## JAGANNATH PURI

Jagannath Puri temple is one of the famous temples of India. Jagannath Puri is situated on sea beach in Orissa state. It is a beautiful city.

There is an interesting tale about the temple—Once upon a time Raja Indradumna ordered his men to search for Neel Madhav (Yellow stone idol of Lord Vishnu) from a dense forest. At the centre of the forest was Neelanchal mountain and Rohini kund. Near the kund was the temple of Lord Vishnu.

One brahman saw this temple when he was going with a Bheel—native of the jungle. There he saw dead crows going to heaven. He also tried to commit suicide but there was an oracle which ordered him to go to the king and tell that he should not forget Lord Rama and instead of flowers and fruits he should offer cooked rice and sweets.

After some time the king also came over there but he could not see the deity due to his proudness. He felt repentant and started vigorous self-mortification. One day some one told him in his dream that he could see the deity but not in shape of an idol, rather in shape of wood.

After some days king saw a wooden block floating in the sea. He got it lifted from the sea and ordered to make an idol from it. The idol was yet to be completed when again in his dream some one told him that he would like to remain in the same shape.

The king constructed a beautiful temple and established three wooden idols in it. These three idols are of Jagannath, Subhadra and Balrama. These idols are in their original shape even today.



SAPNA ADS.



The Jagannath temple is on a high hillock. It is called Neelgiri. It has four doors. The eastern door is the main door. There is a black coloured *Garuda* pillar of 10.5 metre height. In its eastern side is a *Nritya* temple, *Bhog* temple and on the front side is Jagannath *Baramada*.

On the southern side of the temple there is an idol of *Kaliyuga* and on its top is the Neelchakra flag. There are many ponds out of which Markandey, Shwetganga, Parvati, Indradumna etc. are very famous.

On the western side of the inner part of temple there is Ratnavedi, which is about 1.25 metre in height and about five metre in length. Above the *vedi* is a *Sudershanchakra* of two metre diametre. On its right side are the wooden idols of Jagannath, Subhadra and Balrama. On the left and right side of Lord Jagannath are the idols of Laxmi and Satyabhama. Indradumna's idols are in front of the idol of Lord Jagannath. The whole scene is very beautiful.

Deity's adoration ceremony starts early in the morning. Its clothes are changed many a time during the day. The make-up is done after adoration ceremony and the one done at dusk is treated as an important one.

There is total untouchability. All the people receive and eat the offerings made to the deity. There is a saying about this which means that cooked rice at Jagannath temple is to be distributed among devotees without distinction of cast and creed.

The main offering in Jagannath is made of cooked rice and pulse. In the morning *Purries* and *Malpua* (delicious Indian dishes) are also offered. The unique feature of the offering is that it is cooked in earthen pots.

There are many small and big temples in Puri. Five Mahadevas (name of Lord Shiva) viz Loknath, Tapeswar, Neelkanth, Kapal Mochan and Markandeshwar are famous. Millions of people from India and abroad come here every year to have a glimpse of the deity.

The Jagannath temple is always crowded but during the famous *Rath Yatra* huge crowd gather there to have a glimpse of the idols of Lord Jagannath, Subhadra and Balrama which are taken out in a procession on a huge *Rath* (chariot).

## VISHWANATH

Kashi has a special place among the seven holy cities of India. This is an ancient city. It is believed to be a region of Vishweshwar. Due to its location between Varanya and Asi rivers, it is called Varanasi. The Foreigners called it Banaras. There is a special mention of this city in the holy *Vedas*, *Puranas*, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*.

People from India and abroad visit this city every year. It is famous with the name of *Mokshdayini* (a city of salvation). People still wish to die in this city because they believe that those who die in Kashi go to heaven.

Kashi is one of the fifty two *Shaktipeethas*. It is said that right earring of Sati fell in this city. It is situated on the bank of Ganges in a semi-circle shape. This has been centre of Sanskrit language and is a city of temples.

There are forty one *ghats* in Kashi out of which five *ghats* are famous. At *Manikarnika ghat* there are many temples. The ancient Vishwanath temple is also on this *ghat*.

There is no proof about the time of construction of this temple and also about the person who built it, but it is a fact that Hindu kings gave donations generously. Raja Todarmal reconstructed this temple in the year 1637 and Pandit Narayan Bhatt consecrated the idol of Lord Shiva in it. But in the year 1669 Aurangzeb ordered to demolish the temple and construct a mosque at this site. Later on, it was constructed by Ahilyabai, Queen of Indore, in the year 1777. She constructed a new temple of Annapurna near this temple. It is said that in year 1839 the Lion







of Punjab, Maharaja Ranjeet Singh, donated a pinnacle of gold weighing about 8.25 quintal.

At the entrance of the present temple there is a pavilion and on the western side of pavilion there is a temple of Dand Panishwar. In the courtyard the idols of Gauri and Ganesha are standing and adjacent to them are the temples of Sringer Gauri, Satyanarayana and Avimukteshwar. On the western side is the temple of Shanaishchareshwar Mahadev.

There are twelve *Jyotirlingas* in India, Vishweshwar *Linga* is one of them. It has its own importance. It is not round shaped, rather it is square. There is no water channel and water has to be drained out by hands. Offering worship here has special significance on *Kartik Shukla Chaturdashi* and Mahashivaratri.

Lord Vishwanath is treated as Absolute King of Kashi. Lord Harëshwar and Brahmeshwar are his minister and assistant minister, Lord Bhairavnath is the incharge of law and order. Similarly Lord Tarkeshwar is the cashier and Lord Veereshwar is the storekeeper and other phallus of Shiva are treated as protectors of the subjects. In the courtyard of Vishwanath temple there are one hundred and fifty phallus of Lord Shiva. Dharamrajeshwar is the main one. The whole team is known as Royal Court of Lord Shiva.

Near the temple is a well, known as *Jnanwapi*. Its water is regarded as pure and sacred.

The height of the idol of Nandi is two metres in the new temple and it is facing the old temple.

On coming out of the temple if one walks towards Dhundhiraj Ganesha, one can find the temple of Shanaishchar. The idol inside this temple does not have his body; it only contains his head which is made of silver and is always covered with cloth. The temple of Mahavirji is also there.

The idol in the Annapurna temple is made of brass but it has silver throne.

The entire environment of the temple is devotional.



## KANYAKUMARI

It was northern India which had to bear the maximum brunt of attack of the foreigners whereas the southern India had to bear a few. This is the reason that the traditional temples in Southern India were not affected. They are still standing with their heads high and are attracting the people.

The salient features of the temples of the south are that they have high and huge entrances. The idols in the Kanyakumari temple are at the river side and it is difficult to have a *darshan* without lighting a lamp. This tradition was perhaps started with the fear of *Yavanas*. The temple of Kanyakumari is also similar in this context.

Kanyakumari is a cape at the southern boundary of India. It is a junction of three seas—viz Bay of Bengal, Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean. It is a beautiful place. Bananas and coconut are the main fruits of Kanyakumari. Rice is the main food of people; even *prasada* (offering made to the deity and later on distributed amongst the devotees) is also made of rice. Mangoes are available here throughout the year.

During the month of *Chaitra* a unique scene can be seen. In the Arabian Sea there is the scene of sun set and simultaneously in the Bay of Bengal there is a beautiful scene of moon rising. People from all over the country and abroad visit Kanyakumari during this time to have a view of the sun set at one end and rising of moon at another end at the same place.

At the sea shore there is a temple of Lord Ganesha. First of all people visit this temple and after having *darshan* proceed





towards the temple of Kanyakumari.

The temple of Kaynakumari is very beautiful. One has to cross many doors before reaching the deity. It is an idol of black stone wearing beautiful jewellery of diamond. On special occasions and festivals special make-up is done of the idol and people come to offer their prayers.

The whole atmosphere is sacred and peace giving.

Another salient feature of this place is that near the sea-shore there is a well of sweet water. People use this water for drinking and bathing.

There is a tale famous about this place that once upon a time there was a demon name Banasur. He was very cruel. He worshiped Lord Shiva and got boon from him that except *Kumari Kanya* (virgin) nobody else can defeat him.

Banasur started torturing the gods. They performed a *yajna* to save themselves from the harrassment of Banasur. From the flame of that *yajna* Goddess Durga appeared in the form of Kanyakumari. She was very beautiful. She worshipped Lord Shiva. He was very happy with her worship and agreed to marry her. But she could not marry Lord Shiva because he was stopped at Shuchindriya by Narada at the instance of gods and the auspicious time of marriage passed.

Shuchindriya is a beautiful place. It is at a distance of twelve km from Kanyakumari. It is said that Lord Indra received a curse from saint Gautam for looking with lustful eyes towards Ahilya—the wife of Gautam. Later on, he was freed from the curse at the same place. That is why this place is called Shuchindriya.

Here are the temples of Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh. There is also a very big idol of Hanuman.

Banasur came to know about the beauty of Kanyakumari. He wanted to get her. He came to take her away with his army. Kanyakumari fought a furious battle with him and killed him.

In Kanyakumari there is a large rock in Arabian sea. It is a black stone rock. On this very rock Swami Vivekananda stayed for three days without taking food and water and performed meditation. It is also said that Swamiji got self-realisation on this

very rock. In his meditation Swami Vivekananda saw his Guru Ramakrishna Paramhansa who ordered him to cross the sea. Swamiji took an oath of going abroad and preach about Hindu religion. This rock is called *Yogi Shila* and there is a beautiful memorial of Swami Vivekananda. This is a centre of attraction for people from all over the world.





## RAMESHWARAM

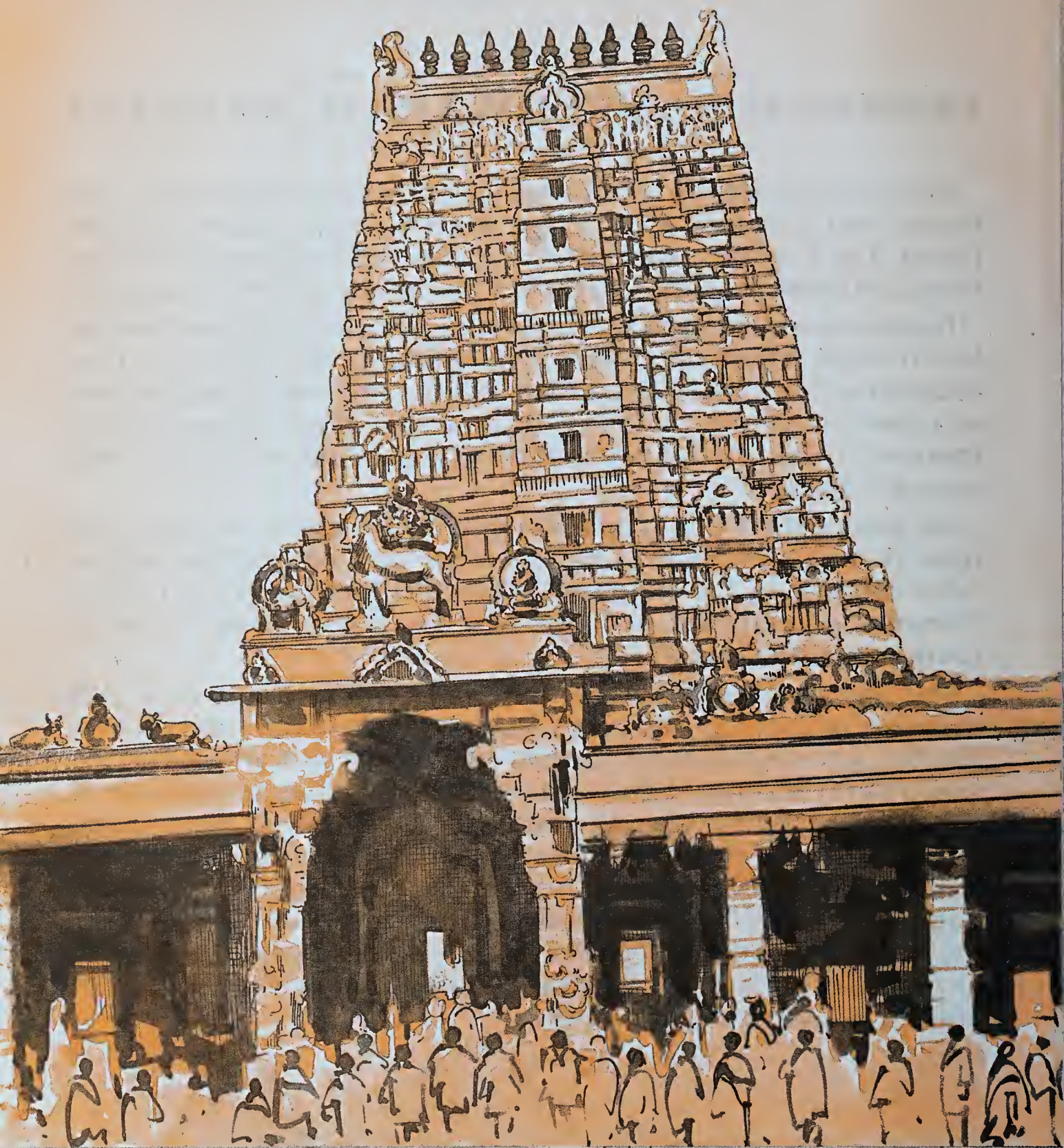
Rameshwaram is one of the famous places of pilgrimage. Lord Rama had constructed a bridge to cross over to Lanka at this place. It is a sacred place. Earlier it was with the main land but now it is divided by sea and the bridge joins it with the main land.

Rameshwaram is an island. It is fifteen km in length and twelve km in width. There are twelve *Jyotirlingas* (phallus) in India. One of them is here. It is believed that when Lord Rama reached the sea shore to attack Lanka, the sea was very rough. He encamped there with his army. He decided to build a bridge over sea to cross over to Lanka.

He established Lord Ganesha first and later on *Navgrah* (the nine planets) and *Shivalinga* (phallus) and offered his prayer. After the prayer his engineers Nala and Neel, with the help of *Vanaras*, constructed a bridge and his army crossed over to Lanka over that bridge.

The famous Rameshwaram temple is spread over a plot measuring about 20,000 yards surrounded by a boundary wall. It has two gates (*gopuram*)—one at the eastern side which has ten storeys and another at the western side which has seven storeys. On entering from the western gate, in the front is a pond called Madhav Tirath. Setu Madhav temple is also here. There are twenty four wells inside the boundary of the temple. Visitors take bath in all the wells. The water of these wells is not alkaline even though they are at the sea shore. All these wells are also counted as places of pilgrimage. Two pools, Shiva and Madhava, are also treated as places of pilgrimage.







On going further the idol of Ramalingam is visible. This is new one. The Shivalingam is beneath the hood of mythological serpent king Sheshnag. The idols of Rama, Sita, Lakshman, Narada, Sugreev, Vibhishan, Angad, Hanuman and Jambavan are also here.

There is a gold moulded pillar in the temple. The statue of Nandi is made of white earth. This statue is four metre in height and three metre in length.

There is a well beneath main temple and it is called *Tirath*. People offer water in this well. The temple of Vishwanath is also near this well and after having *darshan* of Vishwanath, people go for *darshan* of Rameshwaram. Pilgrims are not allowed to offer water on the *Jyotirlinga* of Rameshwaram. It is done by the priest and a nominal fee is charged for that.

The jewellery and other items of property of Rameshwaram can be seen on special occasions on payment. There is a transparent crystal *Shivalinga* which can be seen only in the morning. The milk which the devotee offer to the deity is distributed as *prasada*. This has great importance.

There is a Gandhmadaneshwar *Shivalinga* in Rameshwaram which was established by saint Agastya. It is said that fire test (*agni pariksha*) of Sita was done in the temple of Mahakali which is also near Rameshwaram.

## MEENAKSHI DEVI

Madurai is a famous temple at the bank of Vega river in the Southern part of India. It is called a city of festivals. Festivals are held here throughout the year.

The famous temple of Meenakshi Devi is in Madurai. It is famous for its art all over India and abroad. It is spread on a plot of twenty two *bighas* of land. It has four entry gates (*gopuram*). The *gopuram* on the southern side is storeyed high and the *gopuram* at the western side is famous for its art and beauty.

Normally visitors enter from the gate on eastern side. It is said that Lord Indra had also entered the temple from this gate after killing Vritra. This is a huge gate but some people believe it to be inauspicious. A new gate has been constructed near this gate and now people enter from this gate. At the entrance there is a pavilion. Fruits, flowers and *prasada* for making offering to the deity are available. In the dark pavilion are idols of Lord Shiva, Brahma and Vishnu depicting their childhood. The idol of Sati Anusuya (wife of saint Atri) is also near them.

While going further there is Pushkarini pool and statues of Pandavas. On the wall there are sixty four pictures of Lord Shiva in different postures. The art and beauty of these pictures is worth seeing.

The stone statue of a lion is a unique one. It is the only one of its kind in the world. The lion is holding a ball in its jaw, on moving it with finger it starts revolving.

The dark pavilion is called, man-deer pavilion (*Purush-Mrig Mandap*) because there is a peculiar statue of half human, half deer.







The main temple of Meenakshi is in front of it and at the southern side is the temple of Swami Kartikeya and his two wives. At the temple gate brass statues of door keepers are installed.

The beautiful idol of Meenakshi is in the inner side of several vestibules. It is always decorated with costly jewellery and clothes. The upper top of the temple is mounted with gold and a gold mounted pillar is also in the courtyard. In *parikrama* (a path meant for going around the idol of a deity) there are idols of many deities. On the another side of the temple statue of king of Tirumal, who built this temple, and his two wives are standing.

The temple of Sundareshwar and Ganesha are on the outer side of the temple. The assembly hall of Nataraj has thousand pillars. The silver mounted idol of Shiva doing *Tandav Nritya* and other deities are also there. The Sundereshwar Swayambhoo linga is adorned in the temple.

In the month of *Chaitra* marriage of Sundareshwar and Meenakshi Devi is solemnized with great pomp and eclat. According to the tradition prevailing at that time marriages of other brides and grooms are also solemnized. There is a pool named Saat Samudra. It is told that at the behest of the mother of Meenakshi, Shiva had managed to bring water of seven seas in this pool by his asceticism. Devotees take a dip in this pool.

It is said that once upto a time there was a tree of *Kadamba* (*Nauclea cadamba*) and phallus of Sundareshwar was below this tree. Divine community used to come here for worship. When king Malayadhwaj came to know about it he decided to build a town and a temple there. The king was issueless. With the blessings of Lord Shiva a female child was born to his wife. Her eyes were big, therefore she was baptized as Meenakshi.

After the death of her father Malayadhwaj, her mother Kanchanmala got her married with Sundareshwar. This marriage is celebrated as festival.



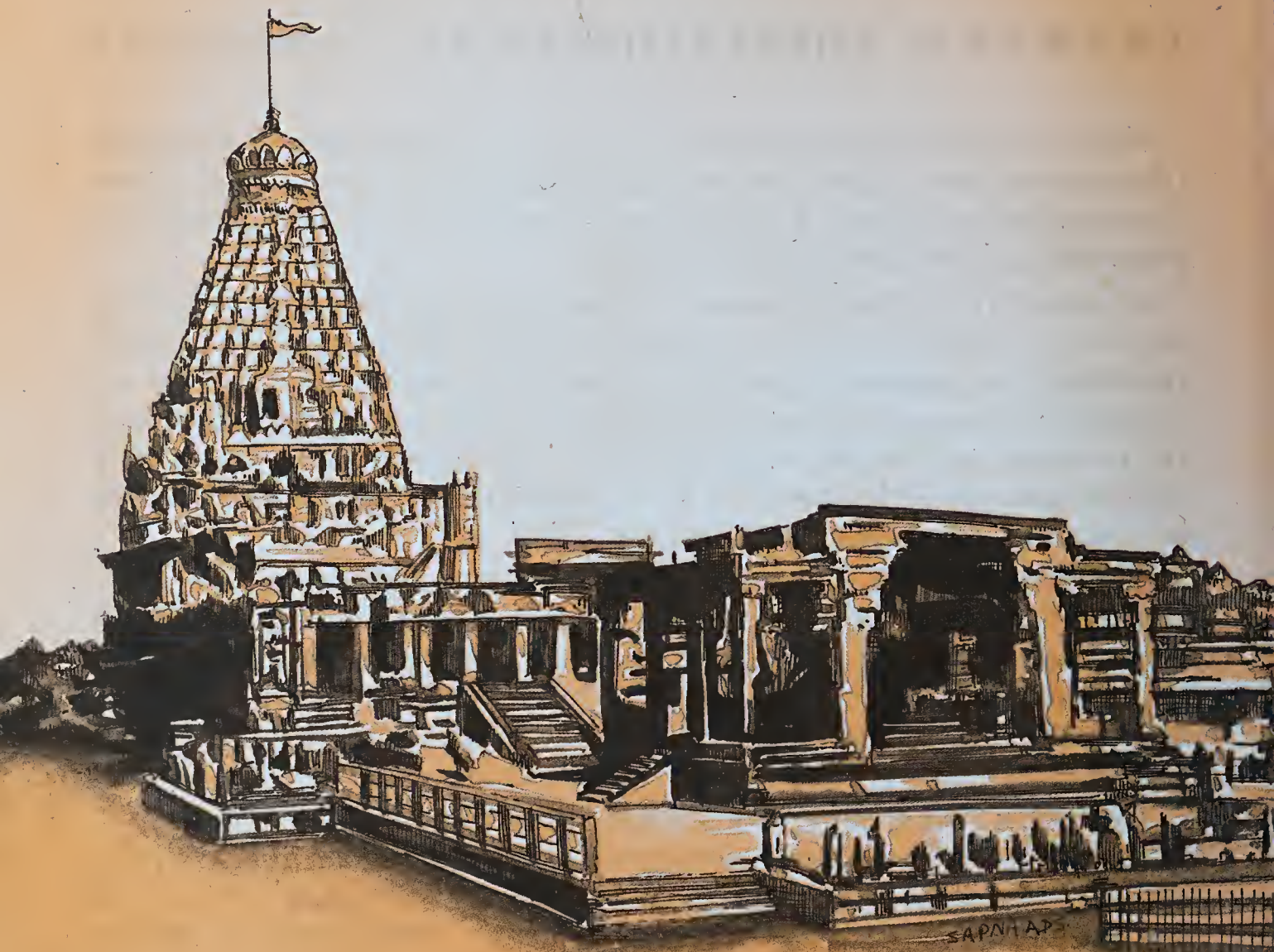
## BRIHADISHWAR

In the southern part of India Tanjore city is situated at the bank of Cauveri river. There are two old forts one in north and another near railway station. Brihadishwar temple is in the small fort. Beautiful idol of Lord Shiva is there.

In olden days Tanjan had a great influence over Tanjore. He was very cruel. He was non-vegetarian and drunkard. He used to demolish temples alongwith his companions and used to disturb people in their worshipping. He was a warrior. He had organised his own army. People were afraid of him. In the famous battle of divine gods and demons he took part in that battle from the side of demons. He was killed with his army.

At the time of his death he requested Lord Indra that after his death that place be turned into a sacred place and be famous throughout the country and it should be known after his name. Lord Indra granted him his request and from that time it is known as a sacred place for pilgrimage and called Tanjavur. Later on it became famous by the name of Tanjore.

Tanjore's ruler were from Chola dynasty. One of them was Rajrajeshwar. The Divine power told him in his dream that in the sand of Narmda river a huge Shiva phallus is lying. He should bring it and establish the same in a temple. The temple in which that idol was placed is now known as Brihadishwar. It is a huge and beautiful phallus. The king had to make a search for Nandi because it was not available in proportion to the phallus and the temple. Once the king found it in his dream and then it was brought from a distance of about 600 kilometre. It is five metre





long and four metre high and its weight is 262.5 quintal.

Brihadishwar temple is in front of Nandi. The top of the temple is sixty metre high and a gold mounted pinnacle has been placed on it. The pinnacle is made of stone and its weight is about 825 quintal. It is hard to imagine how such a heavy pinnacle could have been lifted and put on top of the temple when the modern techniques were not available.

There is one more amazing fact that in the vicinity of Tanjore there is no hill. Therefore it is obvious that this stone would have been brought from some far away place.

In the Ganesha temple of Tanjore there is an idol of KartiKeya having six faces. The famous Shivaganga pool is also here whose water appears to be reddish.

This place is famous after the name of saint Parashar. It is said that a few drops of the nectar, received from sea-churning, were given to the saint also. The saint, instead of using them for himself, poured them in the pool for the betterment of the society.

## BADARINATH

There are four pilgrimage centres in India. Of these Badarinath occupies a special place. The beautiful temple of Badarinath is on the junction of Alaknanda and Rishiganga rivers. It is surrounded by hill named Nara from one side and by Narayan from the other. This old temple is at 3,122 metre from sea level. The beautiful scene of world famous Himalayan range can be viewed from here.

There is a tale famous about this place that in olden days two sages were residing there. Their names were Nara and Narayan. One night they had a *darshan* of God in their dream. The divine power told that a beautiful idol is lying beneath Narada *shila* (a large pile of stones) and a temple be constructed there.

Both Nara and Narayana, with the help of other saints, took out the black coloured idol which was in *padamasana* (a yogic posture wherein the practitioner sits upright with legs crossed over the thigh).

They engaged workers for construction of the temple and after completion, that idol of Lord Badarinath was installed in it and later on idols of Garuda, Hanuman, Kubera, Ganesha, Laxmi, Narada, Uddhava and Nara-Narayana were also installed.

Some people are of the view that previously this idol was in Tibet and Aadiguru Shankeracharya brought it to India. The place is still known as Aadi Badari and people go there for *darshan*.

In the region of Badarinath there are seven pools and many springs of cold and hot water. Visitors take bath in these springs.







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Due to heavy snow in that region the sacred doors of Badarinath are closed down from November to March-April.

Earlier the journey of Badarinath was very difficult. There were no proper roads and people used to walk on a narrow path and took rest in caves during night. At that time the journey of Badarinath was a courageous and adventurous one. But now it is easier. There are metallic roads from Rishikesh and Kotdwara and buses are available from these two places.

Near Badarinath there is Gulab Koti. It is famous because people believe that Goddess Parwati performed her asceticism at this place to please Lord Shiva. On going further there is a sacred place of Pandukeshwar. It is famous about this place that Pandavas, alongwith Draupadi, had gone to heaven through this route.

The pilgrimage of Badarinath is treated as holy one. The pilgrims go on chanting *Badari-Vishal Ki Jai*.

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